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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2954
RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC 8015
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5284
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 9183
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5176
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SEOUL 000090

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STATE FOR EAP/PD FOR SWALKER, EAP/P, EAP/K
STATE PASS USDA ELECTRONICALLY FOR FAX/ITP SCHEIKH
STATE PASS USTR FOR RCASSIDY
USDOC FOR 4430/IEP/OPB/EAP/JDONIUS
TREASURY FOR OASIA/MGREWE
CINCPAC FOR J-74

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ECON](#) [KS](#) [US](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION IN SEOUL

Subject: Media Reaction; Seoul

Presidential Inauguration/New Administration's Foreign Policy/North Korea

"The Launch of the Obama Administration"

Moderate Seoul Shinmun editorialized (01/20): "At her Senate confirmation hearing, Secretary of State-designate Hillary Clinton said, 'America cannot solve the most pressing problems on our own, and the world cannot solve them without America,' indicating her willingness to depart from [the Bush Administration's] unilateral diplomacy. We urge the incoming Obama Administration not to resort to diplomacy based on unilateralism and power in order to resolve conflicts around the world. The Bush Administration called North Korea an 'axis of evil,' but failed to deal with the communist regime. Unlike its predecessor, the Obama Administration should make substantial progress on the nuclear issue through close cooperation with the ROK."

"North Korea's Brinkmanship is a Ticket to Nowhere"

Conservative Chosun Ilbo editorialized (01/19): "Given that Obama's key officials have said that the incoming administration's top foreign policy priorities would be problems in Afghanistan and the Middle East, North Korea's unexpected military statement smells like a bid to put itself higher on the U.S. priority list. If that was the aim, it would be self-defeating. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said last month that only a fool would trust North Korea. If North Korea engages in any military confrontation on the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the West Sea as it warned, it will only cement in the minds of the Obama Administration the impression that it is a difficult country to trust and negotiate with. That will make it more difficult for North Korea to realize its desire to sit down face-to-face with senior U.S. officials."

"Pyongyang's Posturing"

Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo editorialized (01/19): "North Korea appears to be testing bolder brinkmanship to draw attention from Seoul and the incoming Obama Administration. However, it needs to be aware that the world has become weary of its games of brinkmanship. Pyongyang may still have room for gains in its

nuclear strategy. However, that kind of maneuvering would be just a waste of time and do little to help its dismal economic state. It is obvious from the record that North Korea has long been a beneficiary of international support, but failed to use the resources to improve its economy. So once again we are forced to emphasize that the fundamental remedy to its economic woes would be to abandon its nuclear ambitions and to guarantee nuclear-free security."

"The ROKG, Military, and People Should Respond Calmly and Sternly to North Korea's Threat"

Conservative Dong-a Ilbo editorialized (01/19): "North Korea's intentions are evident. It intends to return inter-Korean ties to a decade ago, when the ROK provided it with 'generous handouts.' It also aims to create divisions and chaos in ROK society by provoking internal conflicts in the ROK. With the launch of the Obama Administration drawing nearer, the North may also aim to obtain a better position in nuclear talks by taking preemptive actions. Its threat also seems intended to distract the attention of North Koreans from Chairman Kim Jong-il's poor health to external factors.

Since the North Korean regime is beyond common sense, we cannot rule out the possibility, either, of a military provocation from the North in the worst-case scenario. Only when the ROK and the U.S. make it clear that they will not tolerate North Korea's provocation against the ROK and its nuclear possession under any circumstances can they prevent the North from acting imprudently."

Stephens